



Joanna Simone: Harrison native moves from fashion to real estate

By

[Laura Mogil](#)

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Joanna Simone, 34, is part of the third generation of her family to run Bronx-based Simone Development Cos., one of the leading real estate investment companies in the tristate area. As a vice president of the company she oversees leasing and property management for more than 100 commercial properties exceeding 6 million square feet.



Simone

A native of Harrison who lives in Manhattan, Simone said she wasn't always interested in a career in real estate, but rather had her eyes initially set on the fashion industry.

"My father never pressured me into joining the business. He just always pushed for me to give everything I was doing 100 percent, whether it was playing sports, completing a school project

or advancing my career,” she said. “He instilled a strong work ethic in me but allowed me to find my own way.”

After earning her bachelor’s degree from Boston University in 2006, Simone went to work for P2F Holdings (currently known as MADA Luxe), one of the largest distributors of discounted designer and branded merchandise in the U.S. Starting as an assistant/receptionist, she quickly rose to the position of national sales manager for ladies apparel (producing over \$20 million in sales annually).

Talking about her switch in careers from fashion to real estate in 2012, Simone said, “The entrepreneurial aspect of owning and expanding the business with my family is ultimately what made me decide to leave. I worked so hard and put everything into what I did, and I really wanted to have ownership in that.” She added, “I had this opportunity to work side by side with my own family, for a business that my dad and grandfather had worked so hard to build, and I realized it was something that I really wanted to be a part of.”

Noting that her prior career was a huge help to her when starting at the family business, Simone said, “The most important tools I developed in my first job were the experience of navigating the workforce as well as my sales and management skills. Sales is truly an art form that not everyone can handle.”

Simone spent several years completing an extensive internal job rotation and also took external real estate professional development courses at the Schack Institute of Real Estate at New York University. “With my sales and management background from my previous career, it became a natural fit for me to work in leasing and property management,” she said. “At our firm, and in general for real estate companies, leasing and property management are two of the most important areas of our business — aside from acquisitions, they really fuel everything. I wanted to be where the action was taking place.”

In addition to working with her family, the fact that every day brings new challenges inspires Simone at work. “I really enjoy all aspects of the business, whether it’s negotiating a new lease, handling a tenant-related issue or researching a new building we’re looking to acquire.”

Simone has been very involved in leasing at the Boyce Thompson Center, an innovative mixed-use property in northern Yonkers. The campus features 85,000 square feet of medical offices, retail stores and restaurants.

According to Simone, the 1920s building has been totally restored and is primarily occupied by medical practices. The campus includes St. John’s Riverside Hospital, which is inside a 15,000-square-foot freestanding medical building on the site as well as a 20,000-square-foot building for Westmed Medical Group. Among the other health care tenants are Westchester Gastroenterology, ColumbiaDoctors, and ENT and Allergy Associates, as well as ancillary establishments such as Fortina restaurant and Starbucks.

Simone’s health care properties are in Westchester County, Fairfield County, Long Island, the Bronx, Manhattan and northern New Jersey. Simone says there are plans for the company to

continue to expand its involvement in this arena. “Our firm does it all — industrial, office, medical and retail — so the sky is the limit. But right now our focus has been in the ambulatory health care development area. We believe in it and want to make a difference in how it is delivered to the community,” she said.

According to Simone, the company’s health care development division comes in and works with health care providers, helping them with everything from finding a location to getting the approvals. “We are really the go-to development firm for health care. Providers come to us because we specialize in planning, designing, building, financing and managing medical office buildings, ambulatory care facilities and hospitals,” she said.